

Message Text

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AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 1761

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, AS

SUBJECT: MEDIBANK STRIKE

1. WHILE IT IS TOO SOON TODAY TO ESTIMATE THE TOTAL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEDIBANK STRIKE, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THERE IS BY NO MEANS TOTAL AGREEMENT AMONG UNION LEADERSHIP. IN A WEEK-END CONVERSATION WITH LAURIE SHORT, FEDERAL SECRETARY OF THE IRONWORKER'S UNION, HE CONFIDED HIS OWN DISTASTE FOR THE STRIKE. SHORT JUDGED THAT THE STRIKE WOULD PRODUCE WIDESPREAD DISLOCATION ON JULY 12, PARTICULARLY IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AND THAT MANY LABORERS WOULD SIMPLY REGARD THE STRIKE AS A LONG WEEKEND WITHOUT MONDAY PAY. ON THE OTHER HAND SHORT THINKS THAT THERE MAY BE CONSIDERABLE LOW LEVEL DISSATISFACTION WITH UTILIZING THE STRIKE WEAPON IN THIS MANNER AND THAT THERE MAY BE SIGNIFICANT SUBSEQUENT RAMIFICATIONS INCLUDING RESISTANCE TO THE LEADERSHIP OF LEFTIST UNIONS AND IN SOME CASES EVEN DROPPING OUT OR FAILING TO PAY DUES. IF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STRIKE IS WEAKENED BY NON-PARTICIPATION THESE CONSEQUENCES WILL BE INCREASED. IN ANY CASE THE STRIKE IS GOING TO PROVE TO BE A COSTLY LESSON TO THE COUNTRY ON THE POWER OF THE UNIONS AND ON THE POWER OF THE LEFT-WING WITHIN THE UNIONS. AS SHORT SAYS, "THIS IS THE PRICE OF APATHY."

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WM SHORT WENT ON TO CRITICIZE ACTU PRESIDENT HAWKE AS BEING

"SOMEWHAT NEUROTIC" AND AS HAVING "PAINTED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER BY HIS BIG BLUFF FROM WHICH HE CANNOT RETREAT". SHORT POINTED OUT THAT HAWKE HAD PINNED EVERYTHING ON HIS ABILITY TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND HAD ASKED TOO MUCH. WHEN THE GOVERNMENT CAME TO THE END OF ITS CONCESSIONS, HAWKE "WAS HOISTED WITH HIS OWN PETARD". IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION SHORT VOCIFEROUSLY SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT MAKE ANY MORE CONCESSIONS NOW. CONTRARY TO THE IMPRESSION WHICH THE UNIONS HAD SOUGHT TO CIRCULATE, THE PEOPLE ARE "NOT REPEAT NOT STEAMED UP ABOUT MEDIBANK."

3. COMMENT: LAURIE SHORT IS, OF COURSE, WELL KNOWN AS A RIGHT-WING LABOR LEADER, A ONE-TIME TROTSKIST DURING WORLD WAR II WHO LEARNED BETTER AFTER THE WAR AND WITH JOHN KERR (NOW GOVERNOR GENERAL) AS HIS LAWYER TOOK THE IRONWORKERS UNION AWAY FROM COMMUNIST CONTROL BY OBTAINING A COURT ORDERED AND MONITORED NEW ELECTION. WHILE SHORT IS BY NO MEANS A TYPICAL LABOR LEADER, YET HE IS NOT ALONE IN HIS VIEWS WHICH LIKE A CAREFUL UNION BUREAUCRAT HE KEEPS TO HIMSELF AND HIS FRIENDS. HANNAH

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